

Message Text

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SUBJECT: ROK-JAPAN RELATIONS

REF: TOKYO 2217; TOKYO

SUMMARY: GOJ HAS HARDENED POSITION ON KIM TAE-CHUNG CASE, HESITATED TO SCHEDULE JOINT MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE, AND ACTED IN DISJOINTED FASHION ON AID TO ROK AND EX-IM CREDITS TO PYONGYANG (REFTEL). INCONSISTENT PERFORMANCE MAY STEM FROM INTERNAL WEAKNESS OF MIKI GOVERNMENT, INTER-MINISTERIAL SQUABBLES, AND WHAT ONE HIGH OFFICIAL DESCRIBES AS PRIME MINISTER'S OWN "DENSENESS" ON ISSUE. END SUMMARY.

1. AMBASSADOR NISHIYAMA HAS TAKEN UP HIS NEW POST IN SEOUL WITH INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE TOP OF HIS GOVERNMENT TO KEEP THE KIM TAE-CHUNG CASE ALIVE. NORTHEAST ASIAN DIV DIR SEO HAS INFORMED US THAT NISHIYAMA SAW PRIME MINISTER MIKI AND FOREIGN MINISTER MIYAZAWA TWICE EACH DURING THE PERIOD BETWEEN HIS CANADIAN AND KOREAN ASSIGNMENTS AND THAT HIS INSTRUCTIONS REFLECT THEIR VIEWS. HOW HE IS TO KEEP THE ISSUE ALIVE IS NOT CLEAR, SEO SAID. NISHIYAMA KNOWS HOW DIFFERENTLY THE KOREANS VIEW THE ISSUE, AND CONSEQUENTLY HOW CAUTIOUS HE MUST BE. ALTHOUGH THE CONNECTION IS INDIRECT, SEO IMPLIED THAT THE IMPROVEMENT IN ATMOSPHERE REQUIRED TO PERMIT HOLDING OF THE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE MAY DEPEND UPON SOME PROGRESS

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IN RESOLUTION OF KIM TAE-CHUNG AFFAIR. PRECISELY WHAT

MEASURES WOULD CONSTITUTE "PROGRESS", WHETHER PERMISSION FOR KIM TAE-CHUNG TO TRAVEL, OR CLEAR PUNISHMENT FOR KIM DONG-WOON, THE KCIA OPERATIVE BELIEVED RESPONSIBLE FOR THE KIM SNATCH, SEO WOULD NOT SAY. HE DID NOT, IN FACT, APPEAR TO KNOW WHAT MOVES WOULD SATISFY THE TOP LEADERS OF THE LDP.

2. DURING MARCH 19 CONVERSATION WITH VICE MINISTER TOGO, AMBASSADOR COMMENTED THAT CONTINUED INTEREST IN KIM QUESTION SEEMED TO REPRESENT HARDENING OF MIKI GOVERNMENT'S INITIAL COONCILIATORY POSTURE TOWARD THE ROK, AND WONDERED WHETHER EXTREME DISPLEASURE OF NATIONAL POLICE AGENCY WITH TREATMENT OF KIM DONG-WOON HAD BEEN CONTRIBUTING FACTOR. TOGO MADE CLEAR THAT POLICE ATTITUDES WERE NOT AN IMPORTANT FACTOR. HE ADDED CRYPTICALLY, "PRIME MINISTER MIKI IS DENSE ON THIS SUBJECT", INTIMATING THAT HE HAD FAILED IN HIS STRONG EFFORTS SINCE THE DAY THE PRIME MINISTER CAME TO POWER TO EDUCATE MIKI ON THE COMPLEXITIES OF RELATIONS WITH THE ROK.

3. TO MAKE MATTERS MORE COMPLICATED, TOGO REVEALED THAT FINANCE MINISTER OHIRA HAD RECENTLY TAKEN AN INDEPENDENT AND UNCOORDINATED POSITION ON THE QUESTION OF ECONOMIC AID TO THE ROK. ON HIS OWN INITIATIVE, OHIRA HAD CALLED IN KOREAN AMBASSADOR KIM AND INFORMED HIM THAT SOUTH KOREA SHOULD NO LONGER BE ENTITLED TO COMMODITY AID. THE FOREIGN OFFICE IS WORKING TO UNDO THE DAMAGE.

4. COMMENT: THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT THAT ORIGINAL INTENTION OF MIKI GOVERNMENT WAS TO LET KIM QUESTION DIE. IT SEEMS EQUALLY CLEAR THAT THE DECISION TO KEEP IT ALIVE COMES FROM THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE LDP. CHANGE MAY STEM IN PART FROM BELATED RECOGNITION THAT ANTI-ROK SENTIMENT AND ANGER OVER KIM ABDUCTION REMAINS STRONG WITHIN PARTY AND DIET. SILENT FOR MONTHS IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE ASSASSINATION OF MRS. PARK, CRITICS OF A CONCILIATORY POLICY HAVE BEGUN TO EMERGE AGAIN, MOST VOCALLY DURING DIET INTERPELLATIONS INVOLVING AMBASSADOR USHIROKU EARLY IN MARCH. LDP LEADERS FOCUSING ON EFFORTS TO OBTAIN APPROVAL OF CONTINENTAL SHELF AGREEMENT MAY HAVE FELT COMPELLED TO KEEP KIM QUESTION ALIVE AS CONCESSION TO CRITICS ON WHOSE SUPPORT THEY RELY. THIS KIND OF TRIMMING IS BECOMING CONFIDENTIAL

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A CHARACTERISTIC OF THE MIKI GOVERNMENT, AND SEEMS A LOGICAL CONSEQUENCE OF ITS WEAKNESS. IT DOES NOT HOWEVER, REPRESENT A BASIC CHANGE IN POLICY.

5. WHATEVER THE EXPLANATIONS, THE PERFORMANCE OF THE GOJ ON RELATIONS WITH THE ROK HAS NOT BEEN PARTICULARLY CONSISTENT OR ENCOURAGING LATELY. LDP APPROVAL OF CONTINENTAL SHELF AGREEMENT IS A POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT, BUT HARDENED GOJ POSITION

ON KIM, WAFFLING ON MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE, AND DISJOINTED
BEHAVIOR ON AID TO ROK AND EX-IM CREDITS TO PYONGYANG (REFTEL)
MUST BE FRUSTRATING TO ROK, WHICH MIGHT HAVE EXPECTED SOMEWHAT
DIFFERENT RESPONSE AFTER RELEASING JAPANESE PRISONERS.
HODGSON

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